

Aruba Produces Aloes For the World's Needs

From the period of Alexander the Great in 333 B. C. to modern medical practice in 1941 A. D. stretches the long history of aloes, and for over 50 years the most important part in that history has been played by Aruba, which, with an area less than that of Manhattan island, exports approximately 78 per cent of the total world's supply of aloes.

Although they are one of the oldest natural sources for medicinals, aloes are grown on a commercial scale in but few places besides Aruba. With the exception of several parts of western Africa, Venezuela, and the neighboring islands of Curaçao and Bonaire, which together produce the balance of world supply, they are grown commercially nowhere else in the world.

Before the present war began, three-fourths of Aruba's aloes were sold to manufacturers of pharmaceuticals in the United States, and the remainder was shipped to England and, in lesser quantities, to Europe. For many years prior to the first World War, aloes gum was often shipped in hollow gourds of various sizes containing from one to five pounds. Most of this trade was with the Balkan states, where farmers bought a gourd at a time, and fed the unrefined gum to their stock as a purgative. In addition to medicinal products, aloes yield picric, oxalic, and other acids.

An exchange exists for the sale and purchase of raw aloes gum and its refined derivative aloin much like those for other commodities in world commerce, and market prices fluctuate according to supply and demand. Over 595,000 pounds of the raw gum was exported from Aruba during 1937, destined principally for conversion to an ingredient for cathartics. Aloes gum in 1938 was quoted at a price ranging from 30 to 35 cents Dutch per pound, although it has been known to fall as low as six cents per pound due to bumper crops. In 1940 the price rose as high as 70 cents.

Aloes were first brought to Aruba in 1864 by Governor Ferguson. In the course of extensive travels, the Governor had seen the aloes industry in parts of Africa, and he observed that the climate there was similar to that in Aruba. He imported the first plants from the island of Socotora, on the west African coast, and cultivated them in an experimental garden on the outskirts of Oranjestad. This place still bears the name "Socotora".

Aruba's aloes (one of over 100 known

Aloes Harvest is Now in Progress



Shown above is the method of harvesting aloes. The plants are sliced off near the ground and placed cut-end down in a tilted wooden trough, allowing the juice to drain into a tin can at the lower end.



Shown at right is a typical furnace for boiling the water out of the juice. The workman is stirring one of the large copper pots.

species) have spread over much of the island almost solely from the natural propagation of the plants. The proper amount of tropic sunshine, cool nights, and intermittent rains during three months of the year combine to make them thrive, with little or no cultivation beyond periodic removal of moisture-absorbing weeds from the fields. They are ruggedly strong plants averaging 12 inches in height and growing in a cluster of thick, juice-filled leaves with sharp tips and spined edges. At long intervals flowers appear on the plants, but do not produce seeds for propagation, reproduction being effected by means of new plants sprouting from shoots put out at the bottom of the cluster.

During the harvest season, from March to October, the leaves are cut near the base of the plant. Care must be taken to cut them at an angle, as improper cutting results in the plant's dying. Placed cut end down in tilted

wooden troughs, the stalks exude their thick, strong-smelling juice, which is dripped from the lower end of the trough into a receptacle. Collected in the fields by boys on donkeys, this lemon-yellow juice is carried to a central shed where it is stored in large vats or drums. In early times the water content of the fresh juice was evaporated simply by pouring the liquid into large, shallow, open pans and allowing it to set. The present method is to speed up the process by boiling. After bits of leaves and dirt have settled out, the transparent liquid is poured into a great copper cauldron with a capacity of 40 to 50 gallons, and a wood fire is lighted under it. After 12 to 14 hours of continuous boiling and stirring it becomes pitch black and completely opaque.

It is then ladled into paper-lined boxes, and when cool is the consistency of warm asphalt. The boxes, weighing 125 pounds, are wrapped in burlap and cart-

Continued on Page 9

President G. W. Gordon Praises Aruba Personnel

President G. W. Gordon, whose annual inspection visit is announced on page 1, spoke this week of his satisfaction with the conduct of Aruba operations.

Since his arrival February 20 he has visited many of the departments, and has complimented the personnel on the condition of the refinery and the efficiency of operations here. After an inspection of the new office building he praised it highly, saying that he considers it the best at any refinery in the world.

During the coming week Mr. Gordon and General Manager L. G. Smith will visit the refineries in La Salina and Caripito, Venezuela.

R. P. Russell, Executive Vice President of the Standard Oil Development Company, arrived in Aruba February 25 on a short business visit.

Two divisions of the Colony Service department tangled February 17 when men from the Stewards department and the Dining Hall played a football game at the San Nicolas Juniors' field. The score: Stewards, 2 — Dining Hall, 0.

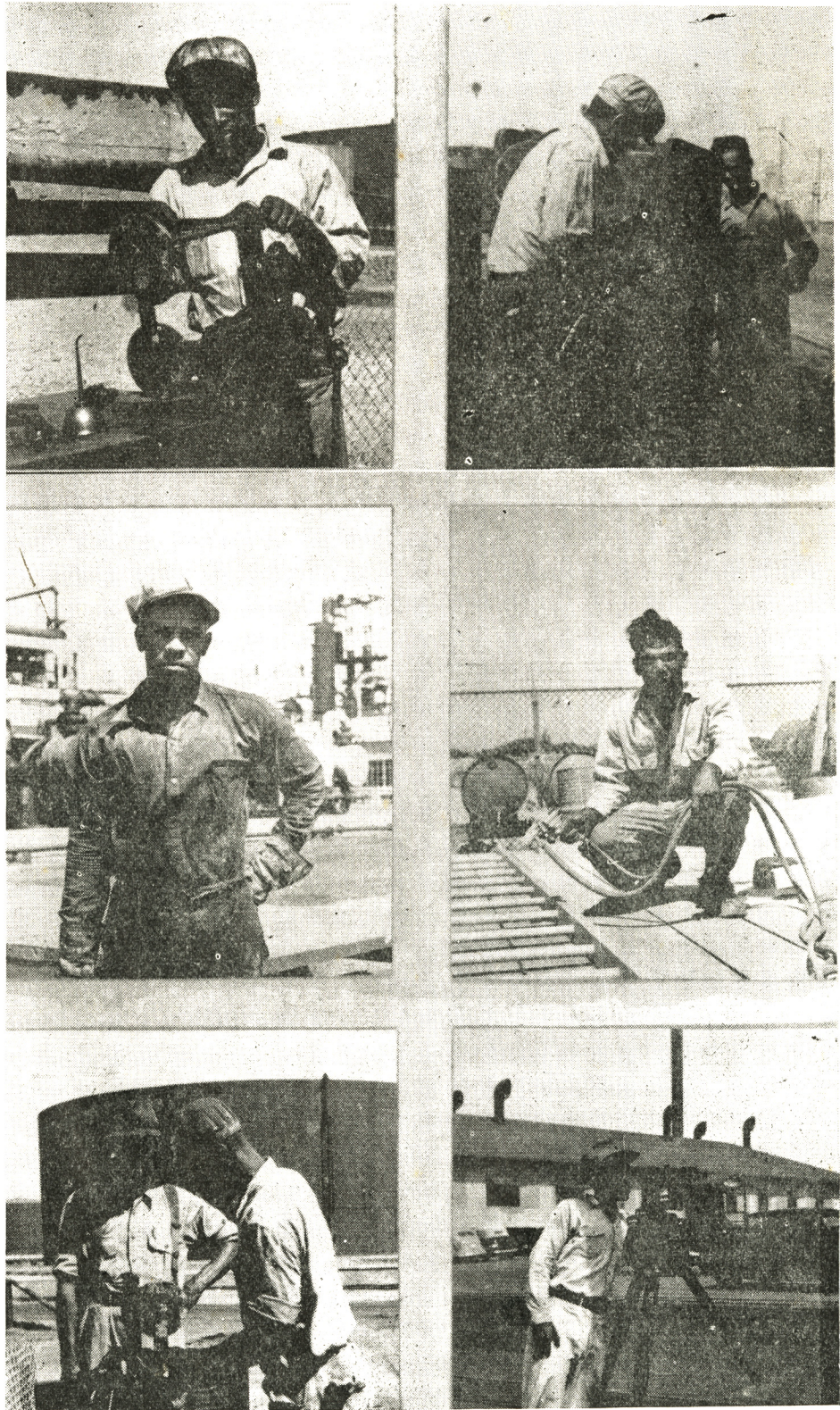
ARUBA'S ALOES *Cont. From Page 6*
ed to one of several dealers' warehouses in Oranjestad, where they await export by freighter.

An incidental result of the aloes industry is the scarcity of trees on the island. Many tons of wood are burned each year under the copper pots. Experts agree that there is much room for improvement in the method of producing the gum, and it has been proved that at least 20 percent of the juice available is lost each year through conditions that could be corrected.

Chemical analysis of aloes gums has shown an average aloin content of 18 to 20 percent for the variety produced in Aruba, as compared to 12 percent for other varieties, thus accounting for the preference shown in world markets for the local product. Many attempts have been made to find a chemical substitute for the properties peculiar to aloin in its major use as a cathartic, but none has yet been discovered. And Arubans hope that none ever will be found, since it would curtail the means of livelihood of families who for generations have worked in the aloes fields for a living.

Fastest of birds is the duck hawk, which has been timed from an airplane at 180 miles an hour. For flashing starts, try ESSO gasoline.

MEN AT WORK



Left to right from top to bottom: Rudolph Milan, Powerhouse; Nicolas de Kort and Lionel Asin, Boiler; Edward Fanyter, Cleanout; Leonardo Boekhoudt, Colony Service; Theodore Vanderpool and Grevendt Fermand, Powerhouse; Frans Croes, T. S. D.